

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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ATLANTIC BRANT POPULATIONS LOW; CONTINUED HUNTING CLOSURES ANTICIPATED

Assistant Secretary of the Interior Nathaniel P. Reed said today that he anticipates closure of Atlantic brant hunting seasons for at least two more years because the population of this goose species, now estimated at about 40,000, is the lowest since the late 1940's.

Reed, who heads Interior's programs for fish, wildlife and parks, said that Atlantic brant numbered 200,000 in the late 1960's and as many as 150,000 in January 1971, but dropped to 73,000 in January 1972. Population surveys and estimates are made by Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service and the Canadian Wildlife Service.

Atlantic brant populations have declined primarily because few young have been produced the past two years on the species' nesting grounds on Baffin and Southampton Islands and other arctic islands in eastern Canada. The Canadian Wildlife Service reported that these areas were still covered with snow and ice in late July last year.

Surveys in this country during the fall of 1971 showed that young birds comprised only 7 percent of the Atlantic brant wintering population, and this figure dropped to less than 1 percent in fall 1972, indicating almost no nesting success. During favorable years, the fall flight of brant can contain 35 to 45 percent young.

"Good production for at least the next two years will be required for the brant population to reach a level adequate to permit a regular hunting season again," Assistant Secretary Reed said. The 1972-73 closure was the first for this species since 1950.

Atlantic brant spend the winter along the tidal bays and estuaries of the Atlantic Coast from Cape Cod to North Carolina. From 60 to 75 percent of the population winters in New Jersey, where the species is an important game bird.

New Jersey's Division of Fish, Game, and Shellfisheries, in cooperation with Rutgers University and the Fish and Wildlife Service, is studying the population and ecology of brant during fall and winter.

During the winter, these small geese feed on sea lettuce (marine alga) and eelgrass. Food supplies are in abundance this winter and brant appear to be in good physical condition.

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